

**BOOK REVIEW**

**CASE STUDY RESEARCH – DESIGN AND METHODS**

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Author:

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**Introduction to author:**

Robert Yin (b. 1941) is a renowned figure among the qualitative and case study researcher. Yin's diverse qualifications span over the disciplines of history and cognitive science. He has authored more than a hundred books and articles. Among them, his trademark is his works on qualitative research methods (including his famous book 'Qualitative research from start to finish') and case study methodology (including the book being reviewed here and other books on the topic). In addition to his individual research work, Yin is also the present of COSMOS Corporation, a firm that has provided research services to dozens of public and private organizations.

**Book Review:**

Case study research methodology is a very widely applied approach which encompasses multiple disciplines and professions including technical and engineering sciences. Numerous books are available that attempt to explain the definitions, types and approaches adopted for this type of study, however, 'Case study research: Design and methods' by Yin is considered to be one of the most comprehensive and well-structured books on the topic. There would hardly any renowned library or university where this book is not read or referenced. It is referenced by thousands of academics and researchers from around the globe. Its step-by-step approach and clear explanation of key concepts make it a very handy resource. Yin's comprehensive methodological articulation encompasses all facets of the case study method ranging from the problem definition, design, and

data collection phases, to data analysis and composition and reporting. Based on his own experiences and a wide-ranging review of case studies conducted by other researcher, Yin points out their application in a number of industries and disciplines.

Number of chapters in the book remain the same as its previous edition. However, Yin explains in the preface that the fifth edition has expanded in terms of its breadth and depth. This claim is justified in the light of information provided in the appendices and the tutorials added at the end of each chapter. In addition to this, a lot of text and formatting has been revised making it more convenient for the researchers to follow the almost step-by-step guidelines present in the book.

Case study research, though highly popular, has seen significant level of controversy and debate. Yin has tried to answer five such objections and concerns in chapter one (pp. 3-26) and provided how and where the case study research can be effectively deployed. In certain situations, Yin believes, it can even yield better results as compared to other methodologies. Those who are yet to decide the methodology for their research would find this chapter to be very useful as it lays out the clear criteria (figure 1.2) that the researchers can use to determine if case study can be productive for the type of problem they are trying to solve or not. Yin has also provided references to some useful case studies in figure 1.1 which can be useful examples (from four disciplines and eight professions) to consider before and during the study. It is also important to note here that case study can be of different types. Yin has categories case studies into three types include explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive types, each being different from the other in terms of objectives and methodological approach.

In chapter 2 (pp. 27-70), focusses on the overall design of case studies, their key components, and quality assurance aspects. Yin proposed five key components that are considered especially important in terms of case study design. This includes research questions, propositions, units of analysis, logic for linking data to the propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings. He then explains each of these components and provides examples. Yin has provided examples of 8 types cases that the case studies can be based upon (figure 2.1). He also delineates the conditions when some of these steps may not be applicable for legitimate reasons. For example, in the exploratory research, propositions would not yield any benefit as the purpose is only to explore and know more about a case or a situation. The discussion than uncovers the ties between the contents in this chapter and the following ones. Yin touches another hot topic in this chapter in relation to case studies, generalization, and explains how and when the information from the case studies can be generalized.

After this explanation about the overall design and linkage of various components, Yin introduces the readers to initial steps in the process in chapter 3 (pp. 71-102). The discussion focusses on training oneself to conduct the case study research, identifying suitable cases, and formulating the protocol (figure 3.2). Each stage in the protocol is then elaborated separately under four sections. The chapter concludes with a discussion on screening the candidates for the study and conducting the pilot study in order to ensure smooth conduct of the main research.

Chapter 4 (pp. 103-132), logically, moves to the data collection processes. Yin provides six key sources recommended for use within the case study research which include analysis of documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and

physical artefacts. This chapter also clarifies a common misconception. Some people think that the case studies are only qualitative in nature. Though the six methods recommended by Yin seem to support this assertion, he separately mentions that the data for case studies can come from qualitative as well as quantitative source. Yin has also provided the principles that are recommended to be followed when collecting data for the case studies. This includes using multiple sources of data for triangulation purposes, maintaining case study database for tracking and evidentiary purposes, maintaining chain of evidences for reliability purposes, and exercising caution when using electronic sources to ensure that the research stays on track.

The key focus in chapter 5 (pp. 133-176) is the data analysis. The discussion focusses on organization and presentation of data for analysis in different manners, development of an overall analytical strategy, methods for finding patterns and insights from the data, use of five specific analysis techniques (including pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis), extracting explanations and questioning them in the presence of rival explanations. Yin has provided nine types of rival explanation (figure 5.1) that can be considered during the analysis.

The last chapter in the book, chapter six (pp. 177-208), presents an overview of the reporting process. The encompasses defining the audience for the case study report, preparing materials that the report would be comprised of, ensuring provision of relevant evidence as required, and ensuring adequate review and good presentation of the report. This, though considered less important by some researchers, is a very important component of the overall case study research process. Yin has provided various structures (figure 6.1) that can improve the weight and presentation of the case study findings. This includes linear analytic, comparative, chronological, theory-building, suspense, and un-sequenced styles of reporting findings.

In the end, Yin has included some useful appendices. Appendix A and B present notes on use of case study in the fields of psychology and evaluation, respectively. Appendix C provides a list of case studies referenced in the text. This can be a very useful armoury for young researchers and academics.

Having benefitted from this book personally, I strongly recommend case study researchers to use this book as their day to day reference. Its comprehensive and step-by-step nature of description, significantly enhances its usability and usefulness. However, it needs to be kept in mind that this is not the only way to look at the case studies. The texts and articles put forth by Stake (1994, 1995, 2013), Meriam (1998, 2009), Thomas (2010), Johansson (2003), Eisenhardt (1989) and other researchers provide a useful alternate view about this methodology and studying those works in conjunction with this book may prove to be even more productive.

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